

Maurer School of Law: Indiana University Digital Repository @ Maurer Law

Articles by Maurer Faculty

Faculty Scholarship

1998

Agony of the Innocents

Feisal Amin Istrabadi

Indiana University Maurer School of Law, fistraba@indiana.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/facpub>



Part of the [Military, War, and Peace Commons](#), and the [Near and Middle Eastern Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Istrabadi, Feisal Amin, "Agony of the Innocents" (1998). *Articles by Maurer Faculty*. 2659.
<https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/facpub/2659>

This Letter to the Editor is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at Digital Repository @ Maurer Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by Maurer Faculty by an authorized administrator of Digital Repository @ Maurer Law. For more information, please contact wattn@indiana.edu.



LAW LIBRARY
INDIANA UNIVERSITY
Maurer School of Law
Bloomington

Agony of the innocents



AP/WIDE WORLD

March 7, 1998: An Iraqi woman mourns at the tomb of her two-year-old daughter.

George Lopez and David Cortright's article concerning the effect of sanctions on Iraq ("Pain and Promise," May/June 1998) merits comment. Lopez and Cortright underestimate the number of civilians who have died as a direct result of sanctions; a compelling case could be made that the number of deaths is much closer to a million. Nonetheless, they make the point that the number of innocents who have died as a result of sanctions constitutes an "appalling tragedy."

It was surprising, though, that Lopez and Cortright did not follow their anti-sanctions argument to its logical conclusion: When dealing with a despotic regime, broad economic sanctions are bound to fail and should not be used. Broad sanctions leave the target regime intact while decimating the civilian population, particularly when the sanctions are not narrowly tailored to achieve the desired goal.

The Iraqi regime that came to

power in 1968 has ruled with an efficient brutality worthy of Stalin. One year after assuming the presidency, Saddam Hussein entered into a war against Iran that ultimately caused the death of some 250,000 Iraqis. In 1988, he ordered the use of poison gas against Iraq's Kurdish civilians in Halabcha. The invasion of Kuwait came two years later. This history should not have made one sanguine about the regime's concern for its citizens' well-being.

Economic sanctions were first imposed in August 1990 as an alternative to war. These same sanctions ostensibly became the instrument for insuring the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction only after the ceasefire in March 1991.

By then, Iraq had been bombed into the pre-industrial era. Its electrical grid, water-pumping stations, and treatment plants were destroyed or damaged. The response of the victori-

ous powers was to keep Iraq in a stranglehold. Ordinary Iraqis were now subject to the good conduct of the regime for their very survival.

The regime had two choices: either cooperate in the destruction of its outlawed weapons programs (developed over nearly two decades at the cost of unknown billions), which would insure that ordinary Iraqis would not go without; or, hang on to the outlawed weapons regardless of the price ordinary Iraqis would have to pay. Given Hussein's history, who would have thought the question would even be close?

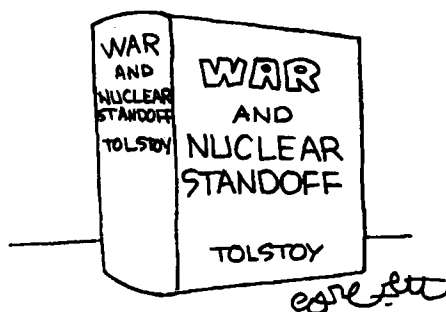
Eight years later, the illogic of the continuing sanctions would be laughable were it not tragic. The dual-use doctrine, which bans the importation of material with both civilian and military uses, is illustrative: Chemicals needed for purification of drinking water are banned, so Iraq's children die from water-borne diseases. Nitroglycerin used to treat cardiovascular disease is banned, even though the dosage is on the microgram scale. Because of sanctions, once solidly middle class Iraqis now sell what is left of their meager possessions for food. Iraq's pre-war, Western-style health care system no longer exists. The simplest medications Americans buy in any grocery store, once ubiquitous, are a dim memory. Anesthetics and sutures are no longer available or affordable. Equipment lies dormant in Iraqi hospitals.

But the situation is not equally bleak for all Iraqis. Last year an assassination attempt critically injured Saddam Hussein's son Uday. A team of French surgeons was flown into Baghdad. Uday, who received the best of Western medical care, is still very much alive. A reasoned observer would ask: At whom are the sanctions aimed, and who is paying the price?

The fiction surrounding the oil-for-food arrangement begs comment. Even if Iraq could meet the quotas of U.N. Resolution 1153, it would garner only \$1.00 worth of food and medical supplies per person per day. Because humanitarian goods must be purchased overseas and shipped to Iraq, the con-

See **LETTERS** on page 66

UPDATED EDITION



democratic forms of government are still in an embryonic stage.

In the end, the uneasy and thus-far peaceful coexistence of globalization and democracy will not last long unless several key measures are taken. Longworth suggests imposing the "Tobin tax," a tax of 0.1 percent on all foreign exchange transactions to slow the global flow of speculative hot money. This is an ingenious proposal that would rein in the world's volatile capital markets, where investors resemble the hunters of woolly mammoths, stalking their prey as they move from one venture to another—a metaphor employed by various writers that Longworth cites. In their hunt, these fund managers destabilize currencies, disrupt relative prices, and bring havoc to economic systems.

Another measure, which would spark much more controversy, would be the creation of a global central bank—or something similar—to stabilize the major currencies. Finally, he proposes uniform rules for taxation, accounting practices, and transaction codes in the securities and stock markets.

Longworth is right when he calls for a new Bretton Woods-type conference to set up rules for global economic coordination. But the nations of the so-called Third World must be integrated into these arrangements. Global security depends on it. ■

Alejandro Nadal is a professor of economics at El Colegio de México in Mexico City and a member of the Bulletin's Board of Directors.

LETTERS *Continued from page 3*

clusion is obvious. This arrangement is a cruel hoax, designed to ameliorate the conscience of the victorious powers. Even State Department officials acknowledge that the program was never intended to meet the minimal needs of Iraq's devastated population.

Maintaining economic sanctions is no longer a rational policy. Instead, it has become a mantra devoid of reason: "Sanctions will not be lifted until Iraq is in full compliance with all Security Council resolutions." Recently, Cong. Lee Hamilton asked Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk to define "full compliance." Tired of hearing the mantra, Hamilton finally had to "demand" that Indyk answer the question. Unable to articulate an answer, Indyk responded that he would have to reply later in writing.

Despite their harshness and their duration, sanctions will not eliminate Iraq's outlawed weapons. State Department and Pentagon officials have conceded that, at best, the chemical and biological programs will have been temporarily delayed. There is thus no nexus between economic sanctions and the U.S. policy of "eliminating" the banned weapons programs. That being so, there is absolutely no justification for prolonging the agony of the innocents.

Military sanctions, including inspections, are another matter. They should be maintained so long as the Ba'athist regime, which is a menace to its own people as well as to its neighbors, is in power. Meanwhile, only deterrence has been proven to be effective against Hussein. The only civilian population he used these outlawed weapons against were the Kurds, who could not retaliate. During the Iran-Iraq war, poison gas was exchanged on the battlefield, but neither side used such weapons against the other's population centers. Iraq could have used its outlawed weapons again in the 1991 war, but, mindful of the consequences, it did not.

As the foregoing was being written, proof of the fallacy of economic sanctions emerged. Just as there were serious discussions yet again that the sanc-

tions might be lifted at the end of the year, the U.N. Special Commission found evidence that Iraq had "weaponized" its poison gas program—that it had loaded missiles with vx—something the regime had been denying for eight years.

The sanctions against Iraq have been the most crippling and effective sanctions imposed in the history of the United Nations, and their consequences will be felt for generations. Yet they have not caused the regime to be forthcoming, because the regime is virtually immune from their effects. State Department officials repeat the mantra while Hussein remains callously indifferent to the suffering of his own people. There is thus a perverse complicity between the United States and Hussein in perpetrating a genocide on Iraq's population.

Far from constituting the basis for a gradual lifting of sanctions as advocated by Lopez and Cortright, these facts demand an immediate cessation of economic sanctions aimed so pointlessly at Iraq's suffering masses. In the end, economic sanctions against Iraq have been shown to be a weapon of mass destruction, akin to a neutron bomb, extracting hellish, torturous punishment of innocents, but leaving Saddam Hussein free to build palaces and play hide-and-seek with the world.

Faisal Amin al-Istrabadi
Merrillville, Indiana

Look to the army

The July/August issue, which looked at the Indian/Pakistani nuclear tests, was good. Here, I add just a footnote.

A week after the May 11 Indian tests, Pakistani Prime Minister Mohammad Nawaz Sharif was asked why Pakistan had not tested. He answered: "Why we are not testing this capability is because of the fact I want to show the world that Pakistan is a responsible country. . . . If India is doing it out of sheer madness, we do not have to blindly follow suit."

Less than two weeks later, Pakistan tested. Why did this strong, thoughtful man finally make the decision to au-